The Seven Knights of Lara[1]

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Introduction

The *Siete infantes de Lara*—in English, the *Seven Knights of Lara*—is one of the most important epic narratives that has reached us because of the cultural, historical, and literary wealth with which the story is imbued. Set during the rule of Castile's Count García Fernández (r. 970-995), its plot hinges upon a family dispute rooted in lost honor and bruised pride. After Gonzalo González, the youngest of the seven *infantes*, offends doña Lambra, his uncle's new bride, she goads her husband, Ruy Velázquez, into betraying and murdering all seven of his nephews. As part of his scheme to avenge his wife's dishonor, Ruy Velázquez sends the knights' father, Gonzalo Gústioz, to Muslim-occupied Spain; there, he sires an illegitimate son, Mudarra, with a Muslim noblewoman (a *mora*, or Moorish woman). In the meantime, Ruy Velázquez carries out his nefarious plan: he leads his nephews into the deadly trap he had set, he decapitates all seven of them, and he sends their heads to Cordoba where Gonzalo Gústioz learns of their tragic demise. Years later, when Mudarra discovers the truth about his origins and of what his father and brothers suffered, he abandons the caliphal court in Cordoba where he had been raised by the Muslim ruler, Almanzor, and makes his way to Castile. Once there, after he is reunited with his father, he avenges his brothers' death by killing the traitor Ruy Velázquez and restores his family's lost honor.

The earliest known version of the legend is a prosified account included in the thirteenth-century *Estoria de España* (*History of Spain*), a chronicle commissioned by King Alfonso X (1252-1284 CE), the Castilian monarch who is sometimes referred to as "Alfonso the Learned" or the "Wise King". The *Estoria de España* is a significant literary and historical artifact for a few reasons. Unlike earlier chroniclers who summarily reference epic material in their Latin texts —in some cases, citing these poetic sources with disparaging disdain— King Alfonso's historians rely heavily on them, and at times, even prosify and incorporate entire poems into the chronicle (the case of the *Poema de mio Cid*, for example). Thanks to their method of preserving what they believed to be important historical information, this chronicle is a repository of heroic narrations that otherwise may have been lost to the ages.

The language in which the *Estoria de España* was composed is another important feature. Breaking with centuries of tradition, King Alfonso's chronicle was the first one written in Castilian, not Latin. This shift to using the vernacular points to the audience the monarch surely envisaged: his successors as well as the realm's prelates and political elite. Indeed, it seems that the Wise King wanted the lessons that permeate his work to reach a much wider public instead of a learned, limited audience able to read Latin.

The decision to cull the legend of the seven brothers from the popular tradition and include it in the *Estoria de España* is also significant. The chronicle's very existence derives from King Alfonso's desire to both unite his vassals by means of a common culture and shared past, and provide them with the valuable lessons he believed to be an inherent aspect of history. The *Estoria*'s prologue underscores the importance of preserving in writing accounts from years gone by, explaining that the ancients recorded both the exemplary conduct of heroes as well as the wicked acts of evil men so that later generations could learn to distinguish the difference between right and wrong. According to recent studies, it is likely that one of the most important warnings that Alfonso X hoped to transmit to his vassals through the *Siete infantes de Lara* was the danger that covert enemies posed to the security of the realm and the grave consequences of treason.

Less than a century later, a longer and more developed version of the legend was included in the Spanish *Crónica de 1344*, a translation of the Portuguese *Crónica geral de Espanha* that was authored by Count Pedro of Barcelos. It would seem that the count had access to documents originating from King Alfonso's historiographical workshop since he reproduced the *Estoria de España*'s narration up through the death of the seven knights nearly word for word. At that point in the story, however, the Count of Barcelos' telling diverges. Whereas the *Estoria de España* rather superficially treats Mudarra and his quest to avenge his brothers' murders, the second half of the fourteenth-century telling is considerably more developed. It fully fleshes out Mudarra's character and narrates with gripping detail the pursuit, capture, and punishment of Ruy Velázquez. Another important aspect of the later version is the very text of Count Pedro's account. In a few episodes, there are traces of assonant poetic verses that seep through the prosified chronistic rendition.

These "relics" of the now-lost poetic verses are important textual clues that are often cited by scholars who argue that the legend of the *Siete infantes de Lara* once circulated in poetic form. Because the corpus of first-hand epic poetry produced in medieval Castile is quite limited—it is comprised of the near-

complete manuscript of the *Poema* (or *Cantar*) *de mio Cid* and two fragmentary manuscripts, *Roncesvalles* and the *Mocedades de Rodrigo*—hispanomedievalists who study this genre must work with what they believe to be the vestiges of heroic texts lost to the ravages of time. The *Siete infantes de Lara* is one of them. Despite lacking conclusive proof that it ever existed in poetic form, some scholars refer to it as a *cantar* (song) and believe that it circulated in verse before it was prosified and incorporated into the *Estoria de España*. To buttress their claim, these critics look to the story's plot, themes, and characters, and they establish connections between this text and others also believed to have epic origins.

Unlike the case of Rodrigo Díaz, the eleventh-century Castilian warrior who was later memorialized in the thirteenth-century *Poema de mio Cid*, nearly all of the characters in the *Siete infantes de Lara* are fictional. Although the text includes a few historic figures like García Fernández, Count of Castile;[2] Almanzor, the ruler of Cordoba;[3] and Galve, a Muslim general,[4] neither historians nor literary critics have been able to positively identify any of the others. While some names like Rodrigo Velázquez, Gonzalo Gústioz, and Gonzalo González are found in tenth-century documents, there is no way to link these men to each other (or, in some cases, even to Castile). Moreover, despite the attempts to establish correlations between the episodes narrated in the legend and a series of documented events that occurred at the end of the tenth century in Iberia, recent studies have shown that such connections do not bear scrutiny. It becomes clear, then, that we are dealing with a fictional account peppered with a few historical details.

Over the years, critics have identified other characteristics common Castilian heroic tales. There is general consensus that Castile's epic—and the *Siete infantes de Lara* in particular—has an air of verisimilitude. Unlike England's *Beowulf,* for example, whose hero fights Grendel, his mother, and a dragon, and France's *Chanson de Roland*, whose hero benefits from God's miraculous intervention, Castile's epic contains no such elements of the fantastic or the divine. Indeed, enemies are often Christian traitors who undermine the security of Castile; in the *Siete infantes de Lara*, the antagonist is a ruthless Christian couple who will stop at nothing—even turning Castile over to Almanzor—for the sake of revenge.

The fact that enemies are often Christians—not Muslims—is another unique feature of the Castilian epic. Unlike the heroic tales produced in medieval France, which demonize Muslims and refer to them as devils and enemies of the faith, many of Castile's extant legendary tales—especially the *Siete infantes de*

Lara—idealize members of this religious group. Almanzor is depicted as a generous and sympathetic figure: he refuses to kill Gonzalo Gústioz despite the benefits he would reap, pardons the Christian's life twice, and raises Mudarra as if he were his own son. Likewise, when the Muslim generals, Viara and Galve, see that the seven knights are exhausted from fighting, they lead them out from the fray, bring them to their tent to rest, and offer them bread and wine. But more than just coming to the aid of the *infantes*, the Muslims want to help them escape from the deadly trap the *infantes*' uncle has set, and they even express regret when they realize that they are unable to save the victims from their impending doom.

Another important quality of these narrations is the active and central role of women. In King Alfonso's version, doña Lambra, Ruy Velázquez's bride, finds herself at the heart of the family conflict: she incites the dispute with her prideful and thoughtless comments at her wedding, and urges her husband to treacherously murder his nephews. Doña Sancha, the *infantes*' mother, plays a very important role in the version preserved in the *Crónica de 1344*. Years later after the seven knights were killed, she adopts Mudarra—thereby enabling him to lawfully avenge their death—and she is also the one who metes out the exemplary and violent punishment to her brother, the traitor, Ruy Velázquez.

Considering the artistry with which this tale is constructed and its broad universal appeal, it is not surprising that it survived in various artistic forms. Although the versions preserved in the *Estoria de España* and the *Crónica de 1344* are judged to be the most important, the narration was modified and included in fifteenth-century chronicles like Lope García de Salazar's *Libro de bienandanzas y fortunas* and in the anonymous *Interpolación de la tercera crónica general*. Around that same time, many of the legend's most dramatic episodes also made their way into Spain's traditional ballads, which are known as *romances*. In these poems, the ballad makers recreate the most intense moments of the story—the wedding episode, doña Lambra's plea for vengeance, the battle in Almenar where the *infantes* are killed, and the moment in which Gonzalo Gústioz learns of his sons' deaths—and heighten the dramatic effect with fiery speeches and even morally questionable conduct.

The appeal of the *Siete infantes de Lara* was not limited to the Middle Ages. Indeed, several important playwrights such as Juan de la Cueva[5] and Lope de Vega[6] adapted the legend into theatrical productions during Spain's literary "Golden Age" (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Other important works were produced in the nineteenth century as well. Ángel de Saavedra,

Duke of Rivas,[7] composed a long narrative poem in which Mudarra is the story's chief protagonist (*El moro expósito*—in English, *The Foundling Moor*), and several other authors published lyrical poems, articles, and a historical novel treating the seven *infantes* and Mudarra as well.

Medieval Text[8]

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[U]n alto omne natural dell alffoz de Lara, et auie nombre Roy Blasquez, que caso otrossi con una duenna de muy grand guisa, et era natural de Burueua, et prima cormana del conde Garçi Ffernández, et dizienle donna Llambla. Et aquel Roy Blasquez era sennor de Biluestre, et auie una hermana et dizienle donna Sancha, et era casada con don Gonçalo Gustioz el bueno, que fue de Salas, et ouieron VII fijos a los que llamaron los VII inffantes de Salas. Et criolos a todos VII un muy buen cauallero que auie nombre Munno Salido, et ensennoles todas buenas mannas, et guisolos por que fueron todos fechos caualleros en un dia, et armolos el conde Garçi Fernandez.

Aquel Roy Blasquez, de quien dixiemos quando caso con aquella donna Llambla, fizo sus bodas en la çibdad de Burgos. Mas una sedmana antes que las bodas se acabassen, mando Roy Blasquez parar un tablado muy alto en la glera cercal

English Translation[9]

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A nobleman from the region of Lara whose name was Ruy Velázquez[10] married a woman of illustrious lineage named Lady Lambra, who was from Bureba[11] and was the cousin of Count García Fernández.[12] Ruy Velázquez was lord of Vilviestre,[13] and he had an excellent sister named Lady Sancha. She was married to the good Sir Gonzalo Gústioz, who was from Salas, and they had seven sons who were called the Seven Knights of Salas. A very good knight named Muño Salido raised all seven of them, trained them, and taught them all the important chivalric skills. They were all knighted the same day, and Count García Fernández dubbed them.

When Ruy Velázquez, the one we mentioned, married Lady Lambra, their wedding was celebrated in the city of Burgos. One week before the celebrations ended, Ruy Velázquez ordered for a target to be erected very high on the shore of the river and had it

rio, et fizo pregonar que quienquier quel crebantasse quel darie ell un don muy bueno. Aluar Sanchez, que era primo cormano de donna Llambla, caualgo en su cauallo et fue alançar a aquel tablado, et dio en las tablas un tan grand colpe quel oyeron dentro en la villa.

announced that he would give a very generous prize to whoever knocked it down.[14] When Álvar Sánchez, Lady Lambra's cousin, saw this, he mounted his horse, rode off towards the target, and hit the planks with such force that it was heard in the town.

Donna Llambla quando lo oyo, et sopo que su cormano Aluar Sanchez fiziera aquel colpe, plogol mucho et con el grand plazer que ende ouo, dixo ante donna Sancha, su cunnada, et ante todos VII sus fijos que seyen y con ella: "agora uet, amigos, que cauallero tan esforçado es Aluar Sanchez, ca de quantos alli son llegados non pudo ninguno ferir en somo del tablado sinon el solo tan solamientre; et mas ualio alli el solo que todos los otros." Quando aquello oyeron donna Sancha et sus fijos, tomaronse a riir; mas los caualleros, como estauan en grand sabor de un iuego que auien començado, ningun dellos non paro mientes en aquello que donna Llambla dixiera, sinon Gonçalo Gonçalez que era el menor daquellos VII hermanos. Et furtose de los hermanos, et calualgo su cauallo, et tomo un bofordo en su mano, et fue solo que non fue otro omne con ell sinon un su escudero que le leuaua un açor. Et Gonçalo Gonçalez, luego que llego, fue alançar al tablado, et dio un tan

When Lady Lambra heard it and learned that her cousin, Álvar Sánchez, landed the blow, she was overjoyed, and in the presence of Lady Sancha, her sister-in-law, and all seven of her sons who were there with her, she said with great delight: "Friends, behold what a strong knight Álvar Sánchez is! Of all those gathered there, not one of them was able to hit the target except for him. He alone was worth more than all the others there!" When Lady Sancha and her sons heard that, they began to laugh. But since the knights were engrossed in a game that they had begun, none of them thought about what Lady Lambra said, except for Gonzalo González, who was the youngest of the seven brothers. He left his brothers, mounted his horse, took a blunted lance in his hand, and except for his squire who carried a goshawk for him, he rode off alone. Once there, Gonzalo González approached the target and hit it so hard that he broke one of the center planks.

grand colpe en el que crebanto una de las tablas de medio.

Quando esto uieron donna Sancha et sus fijos, ouieron ende grand plazer; mas en uerdad peso mucho a donna Llambla. Los fijos de donna Sancha caualgaron estonces et fueronse pora ell hermano, ca ouieron miedo que se leuantasse dend algun despecho, como contescio luego y; ca Aluar Sanchez começo luego de dezir sus palabras tan grandes, por que ouo a responder Gonçalo Gonçalez, et dixo: "tan bien alançades uos et tanto se pagan de uos las duennas, que bien me semeia que non fablan de otro cauallero tanto como de uos." Aquella ora dixo Aluar Sanchez: "si las duennas de mi fablan, fazen derecho, ca entienden que ualo más que todos los otros." Quando esto oyo Gonçalo Gonçalez, pesol muy de coraçon et non lo pudo sofrir, et dexose yr a ell tan brauamientre que mas non podrie, et diol una tan grand punnada en el rostro que los dientes et las quexadas le crebanto, de guisa que luego cayo en tierra muerto a pies del cauallo.

When Lady Sancha and her sons saw this, they were very happy, yet it truly pained Lady Lambra. Lady Sancha's sons then mounted their horses and rode off towards their brother because they feared that some sort of dispute would arise, as it later did, because Álvar Sánchez began to make such grandiose declarations. Gonzalo González responded to him and said: "You handle the lance so well, and the ladies are so pleased with you that it seems to me that they don't speak of any other knight as much as they do of you." Álvar Sánchez then said: "If the ladies speak of me, they do as they should, for they know that I'm worth more than everyone else." When Gonzalo González heard this, it deeply pained him, and he could not bear it. Gonzalo lunged at him—he could not have done it more ferociously—and punched him in the face with such strength that his teeth and jaw broke, and he then fell dead to the ground at the feet of his horse.

Donna Llambla, quando lo oyo, começo a dar grandes uozes, llorando muy fuerte, et diziendo que nunqua duenna assi fuera desondrada en sus bodas como ella fuera alli. Roy Blazquez, quando

When Lady Lambra heard it, she began to scream, wailing and saying that no lady had ever been so dishonored at her wedding celebrations as she had been there. When Ruy Velázquez learned of what had happened, he quickly

aquello sopo, caualgo a grand priessa, et tomo un astil en la mano, et fuesse pora alla do estauan; et quando llego a los VII infantes, alço a arriba el braço con aquell astil que leuaua, et dio con ell un tan grand colpe en la cabesça a Gonçalo Gonçalez que por cinco lugares le fizo crebar la sangre. Gonçalo Gonçález, quando se uio tan mal ferido, dixo: "par dios, tio, nunqua uos yo meresçí por que uos tan grand colpe me diessedes como este; et ruego yo aqui a mios hermanos que si yo por uentura ende murier, que uos lo non demanden; mas pero tanto uos ruego que me non firades otra uez por quanto uos amades, ca uos lo non podría sofrir." Roy Blasquez, quando aquello oyo, con la grand yra que ende ouo, alço otra uez aquella uara por darle otro colpe; mas Gonçalo Gonçalez desuio la cabeça del colpe, assi quel non alcanço sinon poco por ell ombro; et pero tan grand ferida le dio que dos piesças fizo ell asta en éll. Gonçalo Gonçalez, quando uio que non auie y otra mesura nin meior que aquella, priso en la mano ell açor quel traye ell escudero, et fue dar a Roy Blasquez con ell una tan grand ferida en la cara a bueltas con el punno, que todo gele crebanto daquel colpe, de guisa que luego le fizo crebar la sangre por las narizes. Roy Blasquez estonces, quando se uio assi tan maltrecho, començo a

mounted his horse, took a spear in his hand, and went to where they were. When he reached the Seven Knights, he raised his arm that was carrying the spear and struck Gonzalo González such a blow to the head with it that he bled from five places. When Gonzalo González realized how badly wounded he was, he said: "For God's sake, Uncle, I didn't deserve to be hit like that by you. I'm begging my brothers now that they not seek redress if by chance I should die. For love's sake, I'm also begging that you don't attack me again because I wouldn't be able to tolerate it." When Ruy Velázquez heard that, he raised the spear with great rage to strike him again, but Gonzalo González deflected his head from the blow so that it did not hit him except for a bit of his shoulder. Nevertheless, his uncle still hit him hard enough that the spear broke in two. When Gonzalo González realized that there was nothing else better, he seized the goshawk that the squire was carrying, and using it along with his fist, he seriously wounded Ruy Velázquez in the face; he was left so badly injured from the assault that he bled from his nose. Then, when Ruy Velázquez realized that he had been so maltreated like that, he began to scream, yelling: "arms, arms," and all his knights were soon gathered there with him. Once Count García Fernández, who was lord of the realm and there in Burgos, and Gonzalo Gústioz, the knights' father, learned of the altercation, they went to where they were and separated them,

dar uozes et a dezir: “armas, armas” muy apriessa, que luego fueron y ayuntados con ell todos sus caualleros. Mas el conde Garçi Fernandez, que era sennor et era y en Burgos, et Gonçalo Gustioz, padre de los infantes, luego que sopieron aquella pelea, fueron pora alla, et metieronse entrellos et departieronlos, que non ouo y estonces otro mal ninguno; et y los fizo perdonar.

and there was not another act of aggression [and]Ruy Velázquez forgave his nephews.

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Pves que aquella contienda fue apaziguada et abenida et las bodas partidas donna Llambla et donna Sancha, su cunnada, et los VII infantes et aquel Munno Salido, su amo, que fincaron en Burgos con donna Llambla en companna, salieron ende et fueronse pora Baruadiello. Et los inffantes, por fazer plazer a donna Llambla su cunnada, fueron Arlança a arriba caçando con sus açores; et pues que ouieron pressas muchas aues, tornaronse pora donna Llambla et dierongelas.

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Once that dispute was pacified and settled, and the festivities had ended, Lady Lambra and Lady Sancha, her sister-in-law, as well as the Seven Knights and Muño Salido, their tutor, who had remained in Lady Lambra’s company in Burgos, departed from there and headed for Barbadillo.[15] To please their aunt, Lady Lambra, the brothers went hunting up the Arlanza River with their goshawks. Once they had caught many birds, they returned to Lady Lambra and gave them to her.

Desi entraron en una huerta que auie y, çercal palatio do posaua donna Llambla, pora folgar et assolaçarse mientre que se guisaua la yantar. Pues que fueron en la huerta, Gonçalo Gonçalez desnuyose estonces los pannos et parose en

The brothers then went into a garden, which was near the chamber where Lady Lambra was, to rest and enjoy themselves while their lunch was being prepared. Once they were in the garden, Gonzalo González then removed all his clothes except for his linen underwear,

pannos de lino, et tomo su açor en mano et fuel bannar. Donna Llambla, quandol uio assí estar desnuyo, pesol muy de coraçon, et dixo assi contra sus duennas: "amigas ¿non uedes como anda Gonçalo Gonçalez en pannos de lino? Bien cuedo que lo non faze por al sinon por que nos enamoremos dell; por cierto uos digo que me pesa mucho si el assi escapar de mi que yo non aya derecho dell."

took his goshawk in hand, and went to bathe it. When Lady Lambra saw him in that indecent state, it deeply pained her, and she said to her ladies: "Friends, do you see how Gonzalo González is walking around in his underwear? I truly think that he does it for no reason other than to seduce us. I tell you that I'll be extremely upset if he escapes from me and I don't have justice of him."

Et assi como ouo dicho esto, mando llamar un su omne et dixol: "ue et toma un cogombro et hynchel de sangre, et ue a la huerta do están los inffantes, et da con ell en los pechos a Gonçalo Gonçalez, a aquel que ues que tiene ell açor en la mano; et desi uente pora aca a mi quanto pudieres, et non ayas miedo ca yo te amparare; et assi tomare yo uengança de la punnada et de la muerte de mio primo Aluar Sanchez, ca esta iogleria a muchos empeeçra." Ell omne fizo entonces comol mando donna Llambla.

After saying this, she sent for one of her men and said to him: "Go get a cucumber and fill it with blood. Then, go to the garden where the brothers are, and with it, hit Gonzalo González, the one you see with the goshawk in his hand, in the chest. Once you've done this, come back to me as soon as you can, and don't be afraid because I'll protect you. In this way, I'll get revenge for the punch and the death of my cousin, Álvar Sánchez, for this game will hurt many." The man then did just as Lady Lambra ordered him to do.[16]

Los inffantes, quando uieron uenir a aquell omne contra si, cuedaron que les enuiaua su cunnada alguna cosa de comer por que se tardaua la yantar, ca tenien ellos que bien estauan con ella, et ella que los amaua sin toda arte; mas eran ellos engannados en esto. Et assi como llego aquell omne, alçó aquel

When the brothers saw the man coming towards them, they thought that their aunt was sending them something to eat since lunch was taking a while and because they believed that everything between them had been settled and that she honestly loved them; however, they were very mistaken about this. As the servant approached them, he raised the

cogombro, et tirol et dio con ell a Gonçalo Gonçalez en los pechos como su sennora le mandara, et ensuziol todo con la sangre, et fuxo.

cucumber, threw it at Gonzalo González and hit him in the chest just as his mistress had ordered, stained him with the blood, and fled.

Los otros hermanos, quand esto uieron, començaron de reyr, mas non de coraçon; et dixoles estonces Gonçalo Gonçalez: "hermanos, muy mal lo fazedes que desto uos riides, ca assi se me pudiera ferir con al como con esto, et matarme; et mas uos digo, que si a algun de uos contesçiesse esto que a mi, yo non querria uiuir un dia mas fasta quel non uengasse; et pues que uos leuades en iuego tal fecho como este et tal desondra, mande Dios que uos aun repintades ende."

When the other brothers saw this, they began to laugh half-heartedly. Gonzalo González then said to them: "My brothers, you're very wrong to laugh at this. Had he hit me with something else, it could've hurt or even killed me. Besides, if what just happened to me had been done to any one of you, I wouldn't want to live another day until you were avenged. May God make you regret taking such an insult and such a dishonor as a joke."

Dixo estonces Diago Gonçalez, ell otro hermano: "hermanos, mester es que tomemos conseio a tal cosa como esta et que non finquemos assi escarnidos, ca mucho serie la nuestra desondra grand. Et tomemos por ende agora nuestras espadas so nuestros mantos, et uayamos contra a aquell omne, et si uieremos que nos atiende et non a miedo de nos, entendremos que fue la cosa fecha por iuego, et dexarlemos; mas si fuxiere contra donna Llambla yl ella acogiere, assi sabremos que por conseio della fue esto; et si assi fuere, non nos escape a uida, aunquel ella quiera amparar."

Diego González, one of the brothers, then said: "Brothers, it's necessary that we discuss something like this and not remain humiliated since doing so would be a great dishonor for us. With our swords under our mantles, let's go after that man. If we see that he waits and isn't afraid of us, we'll know that it was done in jest, and we'll leave him alone; but, if he runs to Lady Lambra and she protects him, then we'll know that this was done under her order. If that's the way it is, he'll not escape alive even if she wants to defend him."

Pues que esto ouo dicho Diago Gonçalez, tomaron todos sus espadas et fueronse pora palacio. Et ell omne, quando los uio uenir, fuxo pora donna Llambla, et ella cogiol so el su manto. Essa ora le dixieron los inffantes: "Cunnada, non uos embarguedes con esse omne de nos le querer amparar." Dixoles ella: "¿como non? ca mío uassallo es! et si alguna cosa fizo que non deuiesse, emendaruoslo a; et demientre que el fuere en mio poder, conseiouos quel non fagades ningun mal." Ellos fueron estonces pora ella, et tomaronle por fuerça el omne que tenie so el manto, et matarongele y luego delante, assi quel non pudo ella defender, nin otro ninguno por ella; et de las feridas que dauan en ell, cayo de la sangre sobre las tocas et en los pannos de donna Llambla, de guisa que toda finco ende enssangrentada.

Once Diego González said this, they took hold of their swords and headed to the house. When the man saw them coming, he ran to Lady Lambra, and she took him under her mantle.[17] The knights then said to her: "Aunt, don't try to stop us by sheltering that man." She responded: "Why not? He's my vassal, is he not? If he did something that he shouldn't have done, he will make amends for it. As long as he's under my protection, I warn you not to harm him." They then went towards her, seized the man that she had under her mantle, and, in her presence, they killed him in such a way that neither she nor anyone else could defend him. From the wounds that they inflicted upon him, blood splattered onto Lady Lambra's veil and gown, and everything was left bloodstained.

Capítulo 738

[D]onna Llambla, quando sopo que uinie don Rodrigo, cato, et quandol uio entrar por el palatio, fuese pora ell toda rascada et llorando mucho de los oios, et echose a sus pies pidiendol' merced quel pesasse mucho de la desondra que auie recebida de sus sobrinos, et que por Dios et por su mesura quel diesse ende derecho. Dixol estonces don Rodrigo: "donna Llambla, callad,

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When Lady Lambra learned that Sir Rodrigo was coming, she ran to him covered in scratches.[18] With tears streaming steadily from her eyes, she threw herself at his feet declaring that he should be quite distraught because of the dishonor she received from his nephews, implored Ruy Velázquez for his help, and called upon God that she receive justice. Sir Rodrigo then said to her: "Lady Lambra, hush, don't fret and

non uos pese, et soffrituos, ca yo uos prometo que tal derecho uos de ende que tod el mundo aura que dezir dello."

agonize because I promise to give you such justice that the whole world will talk about it."

Et don Gonçalo ueno y otro dia otrossi con sus VII fijos, et ouieron su fabla sobre razón de la desondra de donna Llambra que los VII infantes le fizieran; et pusieron su amor unos con otros, et metieronse estonces los infantes en mano de su tio don Rodrigo, que ell catasse aquel fecho por quien se leuantara, et que el fiziesse y aquello que touiesse por bien et fuesse derecho. A don Rodrigo plogol mucho con esta razón, et començo estonces luego a falagar a sos sobrinos con sus engannos et sus palabras enfinnidas et falssas, por tal que se non guardassen dell.

Sir Gonzalo and his sons went to see Ruy Velázquez the following day, and […]they had a conversation about Lady Lambra's dishonor that the seven brothers caused her. They made amends, and the knights were placed in the hands of their uncle, Sir Rodrigo. They asked him to consider everything that happened so he could determine who caused the dishonor and do what he thought was appropriate and fair. Sir Rodrigo was very pleased with this idea, and he then began to adulate his nephews with his deceit and his duplicitous and false words so they would not become suspicious of him.

Empos esto, a cabo de pocos dias dixo Roy Blasquez a Gonçalo Gustioz: "Cunnado, uos sabedes bien como me costaron mucho mis bodas, et el conde Garci Fernandez non me ayudo y tan bien como yo cuede et el deuiera; et Almançor me prometio que me darie muy buena ayuda pora ellas. [S]i lo uos touieredes por bien, gradesçeruoslo ya mucho que fuessedes uos fasta ell con mis cartas et me le saludassedes de mi parte. Et bien se yo quel plazra et uos dara luego muy grand auer; et uos uerniuos edes con ello, et partirlo emos entre amos." Aqui

A few days after this, Sir Rodrigo said to Gonzalo Gústioz: "Brother-in-law, you know very well that my wedding cost me a lot, and Count García Fernández did not help me as much as I thought he should have. Almanzor promised that he would help me considerably with the expenses.[19] If you're willing, I'd very much appreciate it if you'd go to him with my letter and personally give him my regards. I know for sure that it will please him and that he will give you a lot of money; afterward, you'll come back with it and we'll split it." Gonzalo Gústioz then responded: "Sir Rodrigo, I am very pleased with

respondio Gonçalo Gustioz: "don Rodrigo, mucho me plaze lo que uos queredes, et yre y muy de buena miente por complir uuestra uoluntad."

what you want, and I'll gladly go and comply with your will."

Quando esto oyo Roy Blasquez, plogol muy de coraçon, et fuese luego pora su palacio et apartose con un moro que auie que sabie escreuir arauigo, et mando quel escriuiesse una carta dicha en esta guisa: "A uos Almançor, de mi, Roy Blasquez, salut como a amigo que amo de todo mio coraçon. Fágouos saber que los fijos de don Gonçalo Gustioz de Salas, este que uos esta mi carta aduze, que me desondraron mal a mi et a mi mugier; et porque non me puedo dellos uengar aca en la tierra de los cristianos, assi como yo querria, enuíouos por ende a su padre que uos quel fagades descabesçar, si bien me queredes. Et pues que esto ouieredes uos fecho, sacare yo luego mi hueste grand, et leuare comigo a todos sus VII fijos, et yre posar con ellos a Almenar; et uos otrossi sacat uuestra hueste, et ueniduos quanto mas ayna pudieredes a esse logar mismo, ca y uos atendre yo; et uengan con uusco Viara et Galbe, que son mucho mios amigos; et a los VII infantes, mios sobrinos, mandatlos uos luego descabesçar, ca estos son los omnes del mundo que mas contrallos uos son aca en los cristianos et que mas mal uos buscan. Et pues que estos

When Ruy Velázquez heard this, he was truly happy, and he then returned to his house where he went off with a Moor that he had who knew how to write in Arabic. He ordered him to compose a letter that went like this: "To you, Almanzor, from me, Ruy Velázquez: greetings to a friend that I cherish with all my heart. Be advised that the sons of Sir Gonzalo Gústioz of Salas, the man who brings you this letter, greatly dishonored me and my wife. As I cannot take revenge here in the Christian lands as I would like, I am sending you their father whom you will have beheaded if you love me. Once you have done this, I will then lead my large army and all seven of his sons to Almenar, where we will set up camp. After that, bring your army to the same place as soon as you can, for I will be waiting for you there. Have Viara and Galve, who are good friends of mine, come with you, and instruct them to behead my nephews, the Seven Knights. Of all the men in the world, they are the ones most against you, and of all the Christians, they are the ones who most look for your demise. Once you have killed them, you will have all the Christian lands in your power because Count García Fernández relies so heavily on them." Once the letter was

oueredes muertos, auredes la tierra de los cristianos a uuestra uoluntat, ca mucho tiene en ellos grand esfuerço el conde Garçi Fernandez." Pues que la carta fue fecha en esta manera et seellada, mando luego descabeçar a aquel moro que la fiziera por que lo non descrubiesse.

written in this way and sealed, Ruy Velázquez ordered for the Moor who wrote it to be beheaded so he would not reveal his plans.

Otro dia de mannana caualgo don Gonçalo. Pues que el fue llegado a Cordoua, fuesse pora Almançor et diol la carta de Roy Blasquez, et dixol el luego de su palabra: "Almançor, mucho uos saluda uuestro amigo Roy Blasquez, et enuiauos rogar quel enuiedes recabdo de lo que uos enuia dezir aqui en esta carta." El moro estonces abrio la carta et leyola, et pues que uio la nemiga que yva en ella, rompiola et dixo: "Gonçalo Gustioz ¿que carta es esta que traedes?" Respondiol Gonçalo Gustioz: "sennor, non lo se." Et dixol Almançor: "Pues dezirtelo e yo. Roy Blasquez me enuía dezir que te descabesçe; mas yo, por que te quiero bien, non lo quiero fazer, mas mandarte he echar en prision." Et fizolo assi.

The next morning, Sir Gonzalo took his leave. Once he reached Cordoba,[20] he went to see Almanzor, gave him the letter from Ruy Velázquez, and then said in his own words: "Almanzor, your friend, Ruy Velázquez, sends you many regards and begs that you respond to what he writes in this letter." The Moor then opened the letter and read it, and once he saw the ill will that it contained, he ripped it up and said: "Gonzalo Gústioz, what is this letter you bring?" Gonzalo Gústioz responded: "Sir, I don't know." Almanzor then said to him: "Well then, I'll tell you. Ruy Velázquez wrote telling me to behead you. But because I hold you very dear, I am not going to do that; instead, I'll have you imprisoned." And he did just that.

Capítulo 742

Los infantes se unen a su tío y luchan contra los moros. Todos los cristianos mueren salvo los siete infantes de Lara.

Chapter 742

The seven brothers join their uncle and fight the Moors in the Moorish territory. All the

Christians perish except for the seven knights from Lara.

Los infantes estando alli en aquella angostura, ouieron su acuerdo de enuiar demandar treguas a Viara et a Galbe fasta que lo fiziessen saber a su tio Roy Blasquez si los querie uenir a acorrer o non; et fizieronlo assi. Desi fue Diago Gonçalez a Roy Blasquez, et dixol: "don Rodrigo, sea la uuestra mesura que nos uayades a acorrer, ca mucho nos tienen los moros en grand quexa" Dixol estonces don Rodrigo: "Amigo, ¡yd a buena uentura! ¿como cuedades que oluidada auia yo la desonrra que me fezistes en Burgos quando matastes a Aluar Sanchez, et la que fiziestes a mi mugier donna Llambla quando le sacastes el omne de so el manto et ge le matastes delant et le ensangrentastes los pannos et las tocas de la sangre del? Buenos caualleros sodes, penssat de ampararuos et defenderuos; et en mi non tengades fiuza, ca non auredes de mi ayuda ninguna."

The brothers, finding themselves in that impasse, agreed to send Viara and Galve a message requesting a truce, and one to their uncle, Ruy Velázquez, asking if he was coming to help them or not. And that is just what they did. Diego González then went to Ruy Velázquez and said to him: "Sir Rodrigo, it would be prudent for you to come and help us. The Moors have got us under attack." Sir Rodrigo then replied: "Friend, go with good fortune! How can you think that I have forgotten the dishonor that you caused me in Burgos when you killed Álvar Sánchez, and the dishonor you caused my wife Lady Lambra when you pulled her man out from underneath her mantle and killed him in front of her, staining her gown and veil with his blood? You're good knights, so plan on protecting and defending yourselves. Don't count on me because you won't get any help from me."

Diago Gonçalez quando esto oyo, partiose dell et fuesse pora los hermanos, et dixoles todo lo que les facerira su tio. Ellos estando muy coytados por que se ueyen assi solos et sin toda otra ayuda. Entonces al cabo lidiando todos en buelta, tanto crescio la muchedumbre de los moros, que mataron y a aquellos CCC caualleros que uinieran ayudar

When Diego González heard this, he left him, went to his brothers, and told them everything that their uncle was doing to them. Then, everyone was fighting each other again, and the number of Moors grew so much that they killed those three hundred knights that went to help the brothers. The brothers were also so tired from fighting that they could not lift their

a los inffantes. Et los infantes otrossi, tan canssados eran ya de lidiar, que non podien mandar los braços pora ferir de las espadas. Et quando los uieron assi canssados et solos Viara et Galbe, ouieron dellos duelo, et fueronlos sacar de entre la priessa, et leuaronlos pora su tienda, et fizieronlos desarmar; desi mandaronles dar de comer pan et uino.

arms to swing their swords. When Viara and Galve saw them exhausted and alone, they felt sorry for them, and they took them out from the heat of battle, brought them to their tent, had them disarm, and then had them given bread and wine.

Quando Roy Blasquez esto sopo, fue pora Viara et a Galbe, et dixoles que lo fazien muy mal en dexar a uida tales omnes como aquellos, et que se fallarien ende mal; et que si ellos escapassen a uida, que el non tornarie mas a Castiella, et que se yrie luego pora Cordoua a Almançor, et que les farie por esto prender la muerte. Quando esto oyeron los moros, fueron espantados ende et ouieron ende muy grand pesar. Dixol alli estonces Gonçalo Gonçalez: "¡a traydor falsso! ¿Troxistenos en hueste pora crebantar los enemigos de la fe, et agora dizes que maten ellos a nos? nunqua te lo perdone Dios por tal fecho como este que tu aqui feziste contra nos." Viara et Galbe dixeron estonces a los infantes: "nos non sabemos que fazer aqui, ca si Roy Blasquez, uuestro tio, se fuesse pora Cordoua assi como dize, tornarsie muy ayna moro, et Almançor darlie todo so poder, et el uuscarnos ye por esta razón mucho mal; mas

When Ruy Velázquez learned of this, he went to Viara and Galve and told them that they were very wrong for letting such men live, and, for doing so, they would pay dearly. He also said that if the brothers escaped alive, he would not return to Castile; would go to Cordoba to see Almanzor, who would have them executed because of this. When the Moors heard this, they were terrified and became very upset. Gonzalo González then said: "You deceitful traitor! You brought us on this incursion to lay waste to enemies of our faith, and now you are telling them to kill us? May God never forgive you for what you have done to us." Viara and Galve then said to the brothers: "We don't know what to do now. If Ruy Velázquez, your uncle, goes to Cordoba as he says, he would immediately become a Moor and Almanzor would give him all his power. For what we did, he would then surely punish us dearly. Since this is how things are, we are going to bring you back to the field from whence we brought you because,

pues que se assi para la cosa, tornaruos emos al campo dond uos aduxiemos, ca bien uedes que non podemos nos y al fazer." Et fizieronlo assí.

as you clearly see, we have no other choice." And that is just what they did.

Et como quier que los VI infantes fuessen todos buenos et lidiassen muy bien et muy esforçadamientre, Gonçalo Gonçalez el menor fazie muy mayores fechos que ninguno de los otros. Los moros, quando los uieron sin armas, mataronles luego los cauallos, et desque los ouieron apeados, la muchedumbre de los moros fueron a ellos, et prisieronlos a manos, et desnuyaronles las armas; et descabeçaronlos un a uno assi como nascieran a oio de su tio Roy Blasquez el traydor sin otra tardança ninguna. Pero en tod esto Gonçalo Gonçalez, el menor de todos los VII hermanos que estaua aun por descabesçar, quando los hermanos uio descabeçados ante si entendio que assi yrien todos fasta que uiniessen a ell al fecho et alli se acabarie, et con el grand pesar et la grand sanna que ende auie, dexose yr a aquel moro que los descabesçaua, et diol una tan grand punnada en la garganta, que dio luego con el muerto a tierra; et tomo muy ayna aquella espada con que los el descabeçava, et mato con ella mas de XX moros dessos que estauan en derredor dell, assi como cuenta la estoria. Mas los moros non cataron ya las feridas, et la

Although all six brothers were good and fought very well and with great prowess, Gonzalo González, the youngest, accomplished greater feats than any of the others. When the Moors saw the knights without arms, they killed their horses. And once they were on foot, the throng of Moors then went after them, apprehended them, removed their armor, and without any delay, they beheaded them one by one in the order in which they were born, under the eye of their uncle, the traitor Ruy Velázquez. Yet during all of this, while he watched his brothers being decapitated in front of him, Gonzalo González, the youngest of all seven brothers who had not yet been beheaded, realized that they were not going to stop until they finished with him. With the great pain and the great rage that overtook him, he lunged at the Moor who was beheading his brothers. He punched him so hard in the throat that the Moor immediately fell dead to the floor. Then, Gonzalo very quickly seized the sword that had beheaded his brothers, and with it, he killed more than twenty of those Moors that encircled him, so the story says. However, the Moors took no notice of their wounds, and a crowd of them

muchedumbre dellos cercaronle, et prisieronle a manos, et descabeçaronle y luego.

surrounded him, took hold him, and then beheaded him.

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Notes

[←1]

Translating the very title of this legend into English has proven to be a challenge owing to the fact that the thirteenth-century meaning of the word *infante* is not entirely clear. It seems to have been understood differently at different times and places; when King Alfonso X's chronicle was composed, the term likely meant "son of a nobleman". In order to capture both the elevated social status of the seven brothers and their identity as Castilian warriors—a crucial element of the story—I have translated *infante* as "knight", a title that denotes both.

[←2]

García Fernández (938-995 CE) was the second independent count of Castile from 970-995.

[←3]

Almanzor (938-1002 CE) was the *de facto* ruler of the Caliphate of Cordoba from 976 until his death in 1002.

[←4]

Galve (?-981 CE) was the favorite general of Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) and then of his son and successor, al-Hakam II (961-976). Contrary to what the *Siete infantes de Lara* tells, he never served Almanzor and actually died in battle combating his rise to absolute power.

[←5]

Juan de la Cueva (1543-1610 CE) was a Spanish playwright and poet. Although some scholars consider his work to be of lesser literary quality than that of his contemporaries, he is best known for drawing inspiration from medieval ballads and chronicles.

[←6]

Lope de Vega Carpio (1562-1635 CE) was one of Spain's most important and prolific dramatists. It is estimated that he wrote upwards of 1,500 plays; sadly, however, only about half of them are extant.

[←7]

Ángel de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas (1791-1865 CE) was a romantic poet and, perhaps, the finest Spanish dramatist of the period.

[←8]

This text has been taken from *Primera crónica general de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y se continuaba bajo Sancho IV en 1289*. Vol. 1. Madrid: Bailly-Bailliere, 1906. 2 vols.

[←9]

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[←10]

Ruy is the abbreviated form of Rodrigo.

[←11]

Bureba is north of Lara and northeast of Burgos.

[←12]

Count García Fernández (970-995 CE) was the son of Fernán González, first Count of independent Castile.

[←13]

Vilviestre, known today as Vilviestre del Pinar, is in the southeastern part of the region of Lara.

[←14]

The text describes a competition often enjoyed at weddings and other similar celebrations. A knight on horseback jabbed a lance at an elevated target, attempting to knock it to the ground or break the boards.

[←15]

Barbadillo is near Burgos and Salas

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[←16]

According to several medieval codes of law, such an affront was punished with the same pecuniary fine that was imposed for pulling a knight from his horse, breaking his leg, or abusing a woman. How to interpret this insult within the context of the story is still debated. Some scholars believe that it is a threat made against Gonzalo González's life, while others believe that it carries sexual undertones and should be understood as a threat to his masculinity.

[←17]

According to Germanic law, the space beneath a woman's mantle was a safe haven from danger.

[←18]

These scratches were a sign of her mourning the loss of her honor.

[←19]

Almanzor was the *de facto* ruler of al-Andalus between 970 and 1102 CE.

[←20]

Cordoba was the capital of al-Andalus and was renowned for its highly developed culture and overall splendor. It had a population of over 100,000 and was the largest metropolis in Western Europe.